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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PBTS](#) [KPAO](#) [AM](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: LIMITED AZERBAIJANI REACTION TO NEWS OF THE MINSK
GROUP'S WRITTEN PROPOSALS

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[¶1.](#) (C) Summary: Azerbaijani reaction to the announcement that the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs forwarded written proposals for resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict to the governments of Azerbaijan and Armenia has been muted. The majority of commentators and average Azerbaijanis routinely express their lack of faith in the Minsk Group process -- arguing that it has failed to achieve results -- and their general disinterest in following the specifics of this diplomatic process. While there was limited reaction and the story was not extensively covered in the press, several commentators focused on EUR DAS Matthew Bryza's statement about the potential outcome of the 2008 Azerbaijani Presidential election (septel). End Summary.

Limited Public Interest

[¶2.](#) (C) Political commentator Ilgar Mammadov told us the general public and Azerbaijani intellectuals are not very interested in the news of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs' written proposals for resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict. Reflecting a view we often hear, Mammadov said the Azerbaijani people "do not take the Minsk Group process seriously anymore." Mammadov personally commented that he was not very interested in the news as he saw little ground for optimism regarding a settlement, while observing that the proposals do not appear to be a new development since the Co-Chairs publicly revealed the basic principles in June [¶2006.](#)

[¶3.](#) (C) More broadly speaking, the overwhelming majority of Azerbaijanis we meet with seem to have little confidence or interest in the Minsk Group process, septel. There are varying reasons undergirding this sentiment, but most Azerbaijanis come back to the argument that the Minsk Group process has lasted for years without a settlement. Reflecting a wide-spread view, one Azerbaijani told us the Minsk Group Co-Chairs continue to the region for a few days, hold their talks, but nothing happens. He laughed and said the process is just mere talk with no results.

[¶4.](#) (C) In conversations with oppositionist Eldar Namazov and Taleh Aliyev -- a member of the "Karabakh Forum" organization, which calls for the GOAJ to put a deadline on

the Minsk Group negotiations -- about the written proposals, Namazov and Aliyev focused their criticism on EUR DAS Matthew Bryza's reported statement regarding the likely outcome of 2008 Azerbaijani presidential election in response to a question as to how the elections might affect the negotiations. (Press reaction septel.) Namazov and Aliyev argued that Bryza's statement suggested the U.S. foresees a predetermined outcome in the presidential election.

GOAJ's Bellicose Rhetoric: Who Believes It?

15. (C) The Embassy continues to monitor the GOAJ's rhetoric on the NK conflict and the domestic reaction. The GOAJ has gradually adopted a more bellicose tone toward the conflict in selective public statements over the past several years. Defense Minister Safar Abiyev's recent statement in Astana that the possibility of war is close to 100 percent as long as Armenia occupies Azerbaijani lands fits this broader pattern. Despite the rhetoric, however, the majority of Azerbaijani commentators, and other international observers, do not believe that the GOAJ would initiate a conflict within the next five years. These commentators argue that the more strident GOAJ statements have three target audiences. First, the GOAJ seeks to convince its population that it will not make unnecessary compromises and there is a correlation between Azerbaijan's energy wealth and its negotiating position. Second, the GOAJ seeks to signal to the Armenian government that it increasingly is negotiating from a position of strength. Thirdly, the GOAJ hopes such statements will pressure the international community -- and the OSCE Minsk Co-Chairs in particular -- to lean on the Armenian government to make concessions.

16. (C) Comment: While most Azerbaijani commentators

disregard the possibility for war in the short-term, the GOAJ's bellicose statements are part of a broader GOAJ foreign policy approach that is more confident, seeking to project an image of Azerbaijan's growing regional prestige and strength (septel). As the GOAJ uses its huge inflow of petrodollars to build up its military capacity and demonstrate its regional prestige, the possibility for a military clash along the line of contact exists.

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